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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 000580

SIPDIS

PARIS FOR NEARY
LONDON FOR GURNEY
NAIROBI FOR PFLAUMER
NSC FOR SENIOR DIRECTOR FRAZER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/04/2009

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [Z1](#) [MDC](#)

SUBJECT: WIDE RANGING DISCUSSION WITH SENIOR MDC OFFICIALS
IDENTIFIES AMPLE COMMON GROUND

REF: A. A) HARARE 553

[1](#)B. B) HARARE 397

[1](#)C. C) HARARE 188

Classified By: DCM REWHITEHEAD DUE TO 1.5 (B) AND (D).

[1](#)1. (c) Comment. On April 2, the Ambassador and DCM met with MDC Secretary General Welshman Ncube and MDC Spokesman Paul Themba Nyathi to discuss, inter alia, South African President Mbeki's effort to broker interparty talks between the MDC and ZANU-PF. Ncube detailed March 1 meetings with Mbeki in South Africa, including proposed electoral calendars and the possible motives for Mbeki's premature public statement that both sides have agreed on joint parliamentary/presidential elections. The MDC officials asserted that ZANU-PF factionalism is being driven by a well orchestrated attempt to undercut the position of Speaker of Parliament Emerson Mnangagwa, Mugabe's heir apparent. They admitted that MDC morale was low after the loss of the Zengeza by-election, a result of the MDC's internal wrangling. Ncube called for a strategic approach to bring African pressure to bear on Mugabe that would team Mbeki with Presidents Mkapa and Chissano, an outcome that we also favor. End comment.

[1](#)2. (c) The lunch time exchange commenced with a discussion of the shooting of an MDC activist in Zengeza, reportedly by Minister without Portfolio Elliot Manyika (ref a). Ncube confirmed that the authorities had pressured the family to bury the youth immediately and without an autopsy. Shortly after the shooting, Ncube said that he had spoken with Police Commissioner Chihuri and Security Minister Goche, both of whom claimed ignorance of the incident. Elections Commissioner Gula-Ndebele had subsequently stepped in to provide an alibi for Manyika, claiming that he had spoken with Manyika on a land line telephone in Bindura just after the shooting. Ncube said that while the MDC had not yet accused Manyika, eyewitness accounts all pointed to Manyika. Nonetheless, Ncube expected it would be difficult to bring him to trial even on a charge of manslaughter.

[1](#)3. (c) Ncube spoke at length on a March 1 de facto proximity talks in Pretoria between President Mbeki and MDC and ZANU-PF delegations headed by Ncube and Justice Minister Patrick Chinamasa. After initially declining a meeting with the MDC, in Johannesburg to launch the MDC's RESTART program, Mbeki had relented and agreed to meet with Ncube, Gift Chamanikire and Gibson Sibanda for a briefing on progress toward interparty talks and the mood shift in Harare since December. Mbeki had initially proposed a meeting that included Chinamasa, to clarify why there had been little progress and when the rules of engagement would be ready, but when MDC accepted and Chinamasa declined a joint meeting, Mbeki met separately with ZANU-PF and MDC delegations.

[1](#)4. (c) Ncube said that Mbeki had summoned them back to State House for a second meeting the same day during which he reported that he had met with the ZANU-PF delegation. Chinamasa had blamed MDC intransigence for the lack of progress on talks and specifically accused Ncube of allegedly avoiding Chinamasa throughout December. Chinamasa claimed that only a few minor details remained under discussion and that both sides had agreed on an independent electoral commission, access to voter rolls, etc.

[1](#)5. (c) Mbeki then described a ZANU-PF proposal that Chinamasa claimed had already been presented to and accepted by MDC -- a 2005 parliamentary election followed by joint parliamentary and presidential elections in 2008. Ncube responded that this was the first time the MDC had heard this proposal. (Note: This conflicts somewhat with comments Ncube made to Embassy officers during a January meeting.) Mbeki initially said he supported this solution and that the MDC should be able to live with Mugabe in power for three more years. The MDC delegation responded that the ZANU-PF proposal masked growing factionalism within ZANU-PF over who their next presidential candidate might be, if Mugabe does

not stand. They added that it also reflected Chinamasa's lack of a mandate to agree on any electoral mechanism without Mugabe's explicit prior approval. Ncube suggested that Mbeki should consult with Chissano and other regional leaders on the need for them to ask Mugabe collectively about his retirement plans.

16. (c) Ncube said that at the conclusion of the Pretoria meetings, Mbeki had urged both sides to agree to a joint statement that confirmed progress on informal talks leading toward the beginning of formal talks. When Ncube subsequently met with Chinamasa in Harare, Chinamasa would only agree on a statement that informal talks were ongoing, thus echoing Mugabe's public declaration of last December. Chinamasa then proposed the same dual electoral dates he had described to Mbeki and said that nothing else could come under discussion until the MDC had agreed to the proposed electoral calendar.

17. (c) Ncube told the Ambassador that subsequent to the meetings in Pretoria (or about three weeks ago), Mbeki had sent a letter to Mugabe. The MDC was unaware of the contents and was uncertain about what might come next. He cited Mbeki's public statement after the Pretoria talks that both sides had agreed to simultaneous presidential and parliamentary elections and said that this could be interpreted in three ways. First, Mbeki was simply referring to the draft of the revised constitution, which does indeed provide for joint elections. Secondly, Mbeki was attempting to pressure Mugabe publicly. Finally, Mbeki was dissembling to shore up his own position in the upcoming South African elections. Ncube speculated that Mbeki might feel he has greater latitude to confront Mugabe once these elections are behind him.

18. (c) Themba Nyathi said that the MDC expects ZANU-PF to resort to the same bully tactics that carried the day in Zengeza (ref b). Ncube said that his attempts to meet with Lupane ZANU-PF chairman Jacob Mudenda and Matabeleland North Governor Obert Mpofu to discuss minimizing violence had met with no success -- they appeared to be ducking him. He claimed that ZANU-PF had amassed a 20-billion Zimbabwe dollar war chest to buy votes but said that the good harvest underway had eroded ZANU-PF's ability to use food as an electoral weapon.

19. (c) Although neither predicted the likely outcome of the Lupane vote, they admitted that MDC morale was low (ref a). The loss of Zengeza, an urban MDC stronghold, had been devastating. Ncube blamed the party's contentious candidate selection process for the outcome and observed that the MDC could not afford to take its urban constituency for granted. He blamed party Chairman Isaac Matonga and two other senior labor figures for insisting on a labor candidate without local roots, but exempted MDC President Tsvangirai from blame. He felt that several thousand MDC supporters had protested the high-handed tactics of certain MDC officials by switching their votes, thus providing ZANU-PF's margin of victory.

10. (c) Ncube and Themba Nyathi described growing factionalism within ZANU-PF as an offshoot of a concerted effort by Solomon Mujuru, Simba Makoni, and other members of an internal anti-corruption committee to bring down Speaker of the Parliament Mnangagwa. Police Commissioner Chihuri and Defense Minister Sekeremayi are also involved in the struggle against Mnangagwa, and possibly Security Minister Goche as well. ZANU-PF whip Jerome Gumbo, a Mnangagwa ally, had confided to Ncube that once untouchable pro-Mnangagwa business elites were in detention and under torture in an attempt to implicate Mnangagwa in corruption. Ncube said that, thus far, pro-Mnangagwa elements within the CIO had tipped Mnangagwa off and kept him a step ahead of his adversaries. He said that the continued detention of Telecel Chairman James Makamba is only peripherally connected to this struggle -- Grace Mugabe's infidelity with Makamba was the root cause of Makamba's plight.

11. (c) Ncube concluded his comments by cautioning that the U.S. should not grant Mbeki exclusive control over the process of breaking the political impasse in Zimbabwe. Mbeki had admitted that he wanted the joint MDC/ZANU-PF statement after the Pretoria proximity talks partly to relieve the pressure brought to bear on him by the U.S. and U.K. Ncube thought that a broader approach that included Presidents Mkapa and Chissano would fare better.

12. (c) Comment. For the most part, Ncube and Themba Nyathi's views coincide with our own. We agree that a broader regional approach can intensify the pressure on Mugabe, and simultaneously keep Mbeki on the straight and narrow. Once Mbeki's own election is safely behind him and the Zimbabwe issue recedes as a factor in Mbeki's political calculations, we believe that the time will be ripe to engage with Mbeki and other regional leaders again by organizing the one-time visit by a specially designated U.S. envoy to

Harare, Pretoria, Maputo and Dar es Salaam.
SULLIVAN